Minister's visit to Bangladesh

3085. SHRIMATI SHOBHANA BHARTIA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Union Minister's visit to Bangladesh to discuss bilateral trade and how to fight terror jointly was discussed;

(b) if so, the outcome of the visit; and

(c) the steps being considered to implement the decision taken in the meeting?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) to (c) External Affairs Minister visited Bangladesh on February 19, 2007 to extend an invitation to Bangladesh to participate in the 14th SAARC Summit held in New Delhi from April 3-4, 2007. The discussions with the Bangladeshi leadership centred on bilateral relations and the SAARC Summit. In the context of bilateral relations, both sides agreed to take steps to place bilateral relations on an "irreversible higher trajectory". On trade, both sides agreed to consider ways to provide impetus to bilateral economic linkages as well as improve transport connectivity. Both sides also agreed to jointly combat terrorism, which today poses a grave challenge to our society and threatens the economic development of both countries.

PoWs languishing in Pakistani jails

3086. SHRI N.R. GOVINDARAJAR: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that many Indian brave soldiers who fought for our country in 1971 are still languishing in Pakistani Jails as prisoners of war (PoWs);

(b) if so, the number of Prisoners of War and the steps taken by Government all these days for the release or to get details about those people;

(c) whether Government received any representation from the families of languishing PoWs for return of their heads; and

(d) if so, Government's reaction on this appeal?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) and (b) According to available information, 74 Indian PoWs are believed to be in Pakistani jails including 54 since 1971-72. However, Pakistan does not admit the presence of Indian PoWs in its jails. Government have consistently taken up this issue with Government of Pakistan at all levels.

(c) Government have received, from time to time, representations from family members about the fate and welfare of these Indian nationals.

(d) In pursuance of the efforts to locate Indian PoWs, Government had requested the Pakistan Government to accept a visit by the families of the missing defence personnel to Pakistan.In January, 2007, the Government of Pakistan agreed to accept a visit by the families of PoWs.

Claim for non-permanent seat in UNSC

3087. SHRI B.J. PANDA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether India has staked its claim for non-permanent UNSC seat;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether this would dilute its chances for a permanent seat; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) and (b) Yes. India has presented its condidature for the non-permanent seat of the UN Security Council from the Asian Group for the term 2011-12 Government are taking necessary steps to mobilise support for India's candidature.

(c) No.

(d) Does not arise.